

The Southern Enigma: Essays on Race, Class, and Folk Culture. Edited by WALTER J. FRASER, JR., and WINFRED B. MOORE, JR. Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1983. x, 240 pp. \$35.00.

THIS severely foreshortened anthology from the 1981 Citadel Conference on the South consists of 11 pages of introductions, 158 pages of essays proper, and 53 pages of footnotes and citations to further reading. While the essays, composed by some of the best-known interpreters of the southern experience as well as by some promising newcomers, are almost uniformly well written, the authors were apparently forced to compress so radically that their papers are more provocative and provoking than satisfying.

Divided into three groups of five essays each under the rubrics of race, class, and culture, the papers concentrate almost entirely on the period from about 1840 to 1900. The four chapters by Leon F. Litwack, George M. Fredrickson, William J. Cooper, Jr., and Emory M. Thomas are summaries or slight extensions of research which is already well known to scholars. Ten chapters, those by Lacy Ford, John Scott Strickland, Richard B. Westin, Peter H. Wood, Jack P. Maddex, Jr., Blake McNulty, Ronald L. F. Davis, E. H. Beardsley, Charles Winston Joyner, and Charles L. Flynn, Jr., are among the first, printed fruits of new research projects. One, Grady McWhiney's, is another installment in his well-known "Celtic" melodrama.

In the section on race, Ford finds that sharecropping was very quickly adopted in the South Carolina up-country. Strickland describes but does not fully account for the reasons behind the acceptance in the low country of separate payment for noncrop-related tasks and the "two-day system," in which freedmen, in exchange for working for two or more days a week in the plantation owner's fields, were given plots to

farm for themselves. Westin argues that the North Carolina white Populists' moves toward consolidation and flexibility in educational organization presented the Democrats with a race issue with which to return to power and to discriminate against black education once they had redeemed the state in 1898. Yet, since the Democrats never hesitated to manufacture race problems and since they devised similar means to disadvantage blacks elsewhere in the South, it is hard to see what difference the Populists' drive for efficiency really made. In the last essay in the race section, one which is as enigmatic as the Winslow Homer painting on which it focuses, Wood partly analyzes Homer's "The Gulf Stream," partly charts the tides in American race relations, and partly psychoanalyzes the painter himself.

Adding a detailed footnote, in effect, to Eugene Genovese's approach to slave society, Maddex shows that proslavery paternalism motivated Presbyterian missions to slaves in the antebellum South. McNulty's tantalizing sketch of William Henry Brisbane, a slaveholder who moved north and became a militant abolitionist, does not really make clear why Brisbane converted to antislavery. Generalizing from the sketchy and controversial literature on southern farmers' attitudes toward merchants from colonial to postbellum times, Davis sees antimerchant views as dominant except during the antebellum era. But variations within the South as well as comparisons between southerners' and northerners' postures would suggest complexities not accounted for in either his description or his explanation. Black South Carolina physicians' struggles for and against their race's welfare allows Beardsley plenty of room for subtlety and irony. Victims of harsh discrimination themselves, black doctors, like their white counterparts, were sometimes heroic, sometimes exploitative.

Beginning the section on folk culture with an excessively mannered, one-and-a-half-page long sentence which breathlessly echoes every regionalist cliché from James Henry Hammond to William Faulkner to John Shelton Reed, Joyner offers a peculiar prolegomena to some future grandiose study of an ill-defined southern "folk." McWhiney knows who the southern folk were—they were "Celts"; he knows their inherited cultural traits—they were unambitious hedonists; and he argues here that the antebellum southern educational system was undeveloped because the people disliked, disdained, and feared learning. Why, then, did southern whites respond so favorably to appeals to expand schooling for themselves from 1850 on? Misleadingly conflating the Ku Klux Klan during and after Reconstruction, the turn-of-the-century White Cappers, and the perpetrators of charivaris, Flynn depoliticizes Klan violence, blithely asserts that the Klan reflected a white consensus—instead of being an instrument of and often by the "best men"—and citing trendy studies in European anthropological history, analogizes the white-sheeted murderers to early modern pranksters. Apparently stuck there to balance the number of essays, the papers by Cooper and Thomas uneasily close a book designed in such a procrustean fashion that its constraints subvert not only the purposes of scholarship and reading pleasure, but also probably even—another southern irony?—that of sales.

J. MORGAN KOUSSER

California Institute of Technology

THE VIRGINIA MAGAZINE OF
HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY
VOL. XC. II, NO. 9
COPYRIGHT 1964, BY THE
VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY